State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network

and the

School Readiness Resource Guide and Toolkit:

Using Neighborhood Data to Spur Action

September 2007

Resource Guide

This toolkit is a collaboration between the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) and the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP). Charles Bruner was the lead author of the report and the Des Moines section; Amy Pettine was the lead author of the Providence section. Additional support was provided by Sandra Ciske, Tom Kingsley, and Kathy Pettit. Funding support was provided from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ewing and Marion Kauffman Foundation. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundations providing support.

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Introduction

There is a great deal of interest and work – at the state, community, and federal levels – in developing early childhood programs and policies that can better achieve the goal that "all children start school ready to learn." Policy makers, practitioners, and the public need good information to support and develop effective programs.

To date, most of the information that has been used to inform early childhood and school readiness policy has been collected and analyzed at the state or the overall community (city or county) level. Even community-level information, however, can mask very great differences within a community on the condition of children and their families, the array of services and supports available to them, and the resultant need for targeted strategies in specific neighborhoods. Neighborhood-level data is essential for determining how best to target resources and how to develop effective strategies to achieve the goal of school readiness.

The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a collaborative effort of the Urban Institute and local partners to further the development and use of neighborhood-level information systems in local policymaking and community building. Its members are at the forefront in collecting and disaggregating administrative, service, and other data to the neighborhood level to provide information for use by residents, community leaders, and policy makers in taking action to improve family, child, neighborhood, and community well-being. One of the important goals of the NNIP is to "democratize information" and ensure that pertinent information is available to and used by residents in distressed neighborhoods, who have the most at stake in improving their neighborhoods.

This Resource Guide and Toolkit is based upon the work of NNIP's local partners in collecting and using neighborhood-level information about young children, their families, and the services they receive in order to spur action. The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN), funded by the Ford, Kauffman, and Packard Foundations, has contributed to the development and publication of this Guide and Toolkit.

The first section of this Resource Guide and Toolkit offers a brief description of the importance of school readiness to overall child development and well-being. The second section provides an overview of the role neighborhoods play in achieving school readiness and the importance of examining data at the neighborhood level. The third section describes important data sources for information about young children that can be collected and disaggregated to the neighborhood level, with guidance on how to collect and analyze that data. The final section provides illustrations from different NNIP partners in using neighborhood-level information about young children in different ways to spur action.

This School Readiness Resource Guide and Toolkit represents a work in progress. NNIP and SECPTAN have produced the Resource Guide and Toolkit both to help communities conduct such neighborhood-level analyses and to promote broader investments in such work to better understand both neighborhood-level impacts upon early childhood and school readiness and neighborhood-focused strategies to improve school readiness.

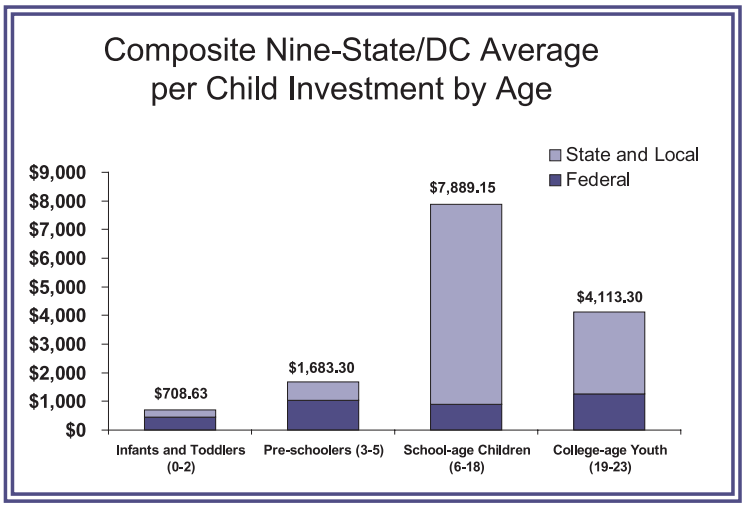
Chapter One
Why School Readiness is Important

Brain research has helped to demonstrate and raise to much greater visibility the critical importance of the first years of life to lifelong growth and development. There is an increasing body of child development research on the importance of these earliest years to all aspects of development (physical, intellectual, social, and psychological), and there is increasing understanding both of the factors contributing to that development and effective strategies to ensure they are in place for children.

The 2005 *Future of Children* volume on "Kindergarten Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps," offers a synthesis of a wealth of research on the correlates of kindergarten readiness, including family, health, pre-school, and environmental factors. Editors Cecilia Rouse, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Sara McLanahan summarized the significance of these findings by noting that: "Up to one-half of the gap in achievement scores in school can be attributed to gaps already evident at the time of school entry."[1]

In *Class and Schools*, Richard Rothstein, draws a similar conclusion, with specific reference to educational strategies needed to meet the goals of No Child Left Behind in closing the achievement gap: "While schools can and should be responsible for narrowing the gap between kindergarten and third grade, eliminating the gap requires actions in the earliest learning years, from birth to school age."[2] Clearly, ensuring school readiness is important for producing the highly educated workforce the country needs for its continued economic vitality in the 21st century.

Greater attention to these earliest years is important, however, not only for school success but for other aspects of child development, including health status, social adjustment, and productivity as an adult. The second *Early Learning Left Out: Closing the Investment Gap* report produced by the Child and Family Policy Center and Voices for America's Children has shown that there currently is a very significant gap in what is publicly invested in development and education in the early years and what is invested in the school-aged and college-aged years. Increasingly, states are making new investments to close this "investment gap," and these investments need to be informed by good data.[3]



Securing investments and effectively deploying them requires information about the status of children and their families and the quality and effectiveness of the services designed to support them.

At the state and the community level, there often are not exact measures of "what children know and can do at the time of school entry," (e.g. valid and reliable kindergarten entry assessments of children that are collected for all children or a statistically sufficient sample of children). At the same time, there is a variety of sources of information at the community level that can help to answer the

questions policy makers need to make wise investments.

As both common sense and the research show, there is no one silver bullet that can ensure school readiness. Instead, it is a combination of factors that will contribute to a young child's health and development and "readiness for school."

The School Readiness Indicators Project, supported by the Ford, Kauffman, and Packard Foundations, represented a four-year effort with seventeen states to develop statewide indicators of school readiness.[4] Each state developed its own specific set of measures, but all did so within the school readiness equation set out below:

Ready Families
+
Ready Early Childhood Education Services
+
Ready Health Services
+
Ready Schools
+
Ready Communities
=
Ready Children

Further, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative identified a set of "core indicators" that most states could collect and track over time for the left-hand side of this equation. Those are shown in the Chart on the following page.

As Chapter Three will show, communities often have access to additional or different sets of measures than those available at the state level, but these core indicators do provide a starting list for looking for community indicators. Bringing available data together on each of these equation elements can help to identify opportunities at the community level to improve school readiness.

Core Indicators of School Readiness

Ready Families

Mother's Education Level – % of births to mothers with less than a 12th grade education
Births to Teens – # of births to teens ages 15-17 per 1,000 girls
Child Abuse & Neglect – Rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect among children birth to age 6
Children in Foster Care – % of children birth to age 6 in out-of-home placement (foster care) who have no more than two placements in a 24-month period

Ready Services – Early Childhood Education Services

Children Enrolled in an Early Education Program – % of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in a center-based early childhood care and education program (including child care centers, nursery schools, preschool programs, Head Start programs, and pre-kindergarten programs)
Early Education Teacher Credentials – % of early childhood teachers with a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood
Accredited Child Care Centers – % of child care centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC)
Accredited Family Child Care Homes – % of family child care homes accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
Access to Child Care Subsidies – % of eligible children under age 6 receiving child care subsidies

Ready Health Services

Health Insurance – % of children under age 6 without health insurance
Low Birthweight Infants – % of infants born weighing under 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds)
Access to Prenatal Care – % of births to women who receive late or no prenatal care
Immunizations – % of children ages 19-35 months who have been fully immunized

Ready Schools

Class Size – Average teacher/child ratio in K-1 classrooms
Fourth Grade Reading Scores – % of children with reading proficiency in fourth grade as measured by the state's proficiency tests

Ready Communities

Young Children in Poverty – % of children under age 6 living in families with low income below the federal poverty threshold
Supports for Families with Infants and Toddlers – % of infants and toddlers in poverty who are enrolled in Early Head Start
Lead Poisoning – % of children under age 6 with blood lead levels at or above 10 micrograms per deciliter

Ready Children

Physical Well-Being and Motor Development – % of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills
Social and Emotional Development – % of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with their peers
Approaches to Learning – % of kindergarten students with moderate to serious difficulty following directions
Language Development – % of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry
Cognition and General Knowledge – % of children recognizing basic shapes at kindergarten entry

Chapter Two

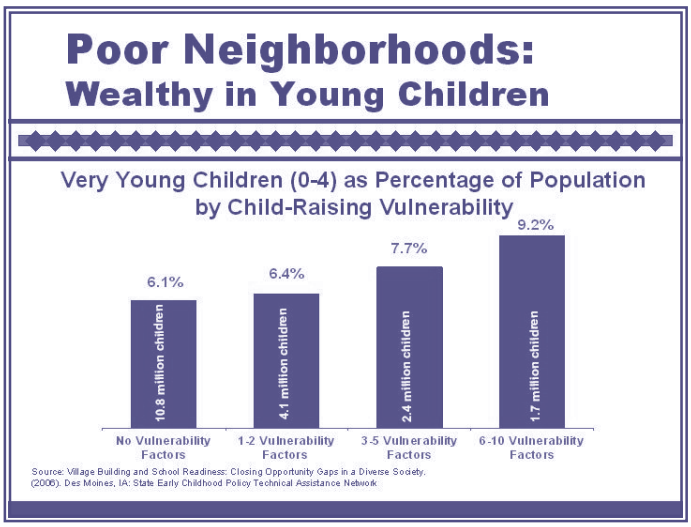
Why Place is Important for School Readiness

One of the elements of the school readiness equation that was described in Chapter One is "Ready Communities." While parents are their children's first and most important teachers, the child's immediate environment – which for young children is often very much based upon a small and immediate neighborhood – also is critically important to development and school readiness.

"Ready Communities" means communities that are safe from crime and violence and free from health hazards such as lead and other toxin exposure. It also means communities that have places where young children and their families can play and learn, including parks and libraries and family-friendly meeting spots. It means an overall environment where children are exposed to rich vocabularies in their daily lives and stimulated by everyday exposure to written words and symbols. It includes but is not limited to high quality early childhood programs and services.

Poor neighborhoods, however, often have far more environmental risks and far fewer developmental supports than more affluent neighborhoods. When data can be broken down by neighborhood, it generally indicates that challenges to achieving school readiness require more intense and concerted attention within such poor neighborhoods than in more affluent ones.[5]

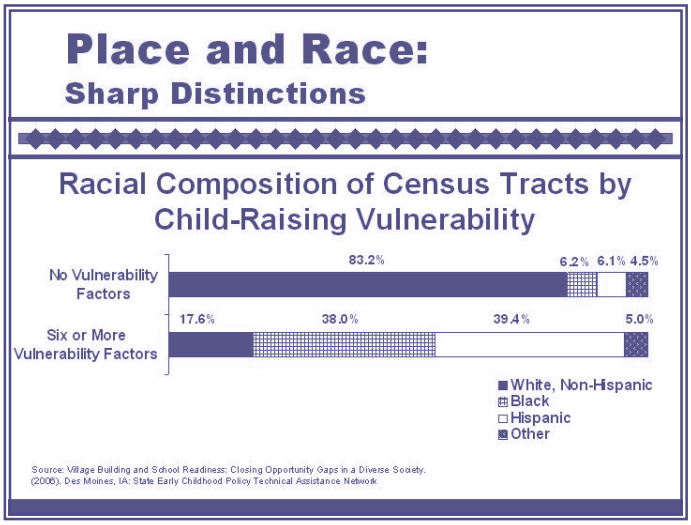
Demographically, poor neighborhoods usually are rich in young children, with much larger percentages of their population in the earliest learning (0-5) years. On this account alone, they deserve special attention in developing early childhood and school readiness strategies. An analysis of all census tracts in the United States, based upon 10 child-raising "risk factors" available from the census, shows that the most at-risk neighborhoods also are those truly "rich in young children."[6] One reason to take a neighborhood approach to school readiness is simply because different neighborhoods have very different proportions of young children, and of young children most at risk of not starting school healthy and prepared to succeed in school.



In addition, however, poor neighborhoods often lack a variety of supports that contribute to child development, supports that may be taken for granted in more affluent neighborhoods. At a concrete level, older and often deteriorating housing stock places children at much higher risk for lead poisoning and asthma. At a more subtle level, the general education level of the adult population often means children are exposed on a daily basis to a much less rich vocabulary and many fewer stimuli, including access to books.

Although research on specific "neighborhood impacts" on child health and development remains limited, there is growing evidence that young children living in neighborhoods where safety is compromised are more likely to experience mental health problems, which in turn affect their educational as well as social development.[7] Regardless of a child's family background and

strengths, a child living in an unsafe neighborhood is more vulnerable to a host of poor outcomes, with neighborhood impacts on child well-being particularly pronounced in the earliest learning years, from birth to school-age.



Finally, these poor and "at risk" neighborhoods also disproportionately are those with immigrant and minority populations. The United States and most of its metropolitan communities have significant racial and ethnic segregation. Again, the analysis of America's census tracts according to child-raising "risk factors" show this racial and ethnic segregation. Census tracts with the greatest number of risk factors are largely composed of communities of color; while those without such risk factors are largely white, and non-Hispanic.

In developing effective strategies to improve school readiness, NNIP stresses that it is essential both to incorporate a place-based and race-based approach, one which involves residents and communities of color as partners in data collection, analysis, and use.

In short, it is important to get beyond a general community approach to school readiness and to employ data and analysis at a neighborhood level to ensure that:

- resources are appropriately deployed where they are most needed;
- specific school readiness risk factors most specific to poor neighborhoods are addressed in developing school readiness strategies; and
- residents and communities of color are involved in the data collection and analysis and use of that information to spur action.

Chapter Three

Collecting and Using Neighborhood-Based Data for School Readiness Planning and Action

In most states, there are no consistent or reliable statewide measures (or even a measure) of what children know and can do at the time of school entry. Ideally, there would be that information, as it is needed for answering the ultimate question regarding the level of children's school readiness within a state (the right hand side, or dependent variable, in the school readiness equation). While an increasing number of states are developing kindergarten entry assessments, there are trade-offs to be made in developing measures with strong inter-subjective reliability, with relatively low cost in design, and with full coverage of the multiple dimensions of school readiness.[8] Currently, many states simply leave decisions on whether and how to conduct kindergarten entry assessments up to local school districts.

Depending upon their local school districts, communities may or may not have kindergarten entry assessment information available to them. When they do, however, it can be used very effectively to demonstrate differences across schools and neighborhoods in young children's development from 0-5. Particularly when coupled with other neighborhood data, it can be used to spur policy actions.

Even when kindergarten entry assessment data are not available, however, there are other, "lagging indicators" from elementary school data, such as third or fourth grade reading scores, that often show profound differences by school and by student home address. In addition, there are a variety of data sources that can provide important information on the different elements of the school readiness equation and point to areas for needed action.

Some of these can be obtained from the bicentennial census. Administrative data sets contain information that provides some further indicators of the status of children and also on the availability and quality of resources and services. Community scans can help identify other resources, particularly those on the more preventive, early intervention, and informal side, that are important for readying both families and communities.

This Chapter provides an inventory of data resources potentially available at the neighborhood as well as community level for conducting neighborhood-level analyses relating to school readiness. It further provides information and guidance on conducting additional community scans as a tool for information gathering.

This includes information on:

- Ready Families: Child and family data
- Ready Early Childhood Services: Child care and pre-school data
- Ready Health Services: Child health and health services data
- Ready Schools: Elementary school data
- Ready Communities: Neighborhood safety, resource, and support data

Information gathering in each of these five areas can help communities understand the circumstances in their neighborhoods and communities that contribute to the goal that "children are healthy and ready to succeed in school."

In most instances, it also is possible to disaggregate and analyze neighborhood and community information by other factors or variables – including race/ethnicity and income or educational level.[9]

Ready Families: Child and Family Data

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Yet some parents struggle in providing the nurturing and developmental support their children

need, and others struggle in providing basic economic support. The U.S. Census provides important baseline information on how many young children live in different neighborhoods, their economic circumstances, and what types of families they live in. Local administrative data, particularly from birth records and from the child protective service system, can provide important information on the degree to which families are vulnerable in providing for their youngest children's development.

Basic information on families also can help determine how much demand exists for different early childhood services. Often, census information on the number of children and families can serve as the denominator for determining the percentage of children or families involved in a specific program or service and the numbers of additional children or families who will have to be served to make a measurable impact in the neighborhood.

Census data on families and children. The following data are available through the 2000 census by very small geographic units (census tract, zip code, and even census blocks) and can also be compared with data for the metropolitan area, county, and state as a whole.

- Number of children, broken down by age:
  - 0-2 year olds
  - 3-5 year olds
  - 6-17 year olds

  Information on the number of children in a neighborhood is important for determining service demand. This child information is available by race as well, which can help in analyzing racial composition in comparison with other neighborhoods or the city as a whole. In some instances, there may have been major population changes since the census was taken, and there are some estimates that can be made to reflect inter-census changes in population, even at the neighborhood level.

  One of the analyses that can be particularly helpful is to compare the young child population by neighborhood with the total population and with the working age (18-64) population. This can show areas within a community where the need for services and supports for young children and their families is particularly high (due to the larger proportion of young children in the population) and where general economic supports are particularly important (due to the relatively smaller proportion of potential breadwinners in the neighborhood compared with children).

- Households with young children (0-5) and their family composition:
  - Families with children 0-5
    - Two parent families with children 0-5
    - Single parent families headed by the mother with children 0-5
    - Single parent families headed by the father with children 0-5
    - Families with children 0-5 headed by a grandparent
  - Other households with children 0-5

  Information on family composition is important when designing strategies that focus upon families and not on individual young children – such as home visiting programs, parenting education programs, and parent involvement and peer support group activities. While three-quarters of young children in the country do live in two parent families, these figures can be reversed in some neighborhoods, where single parenting is the norm. Neighborhood-level data

can highlight both the need for increased support for single parents and for strategies that can reconnect fathers with parenting roles. Research is clear that single parents are much more likely to struggle – economically and socially – in raising children and children are more vulnerable to starting school behind who come from families without two sources of economic and social support. Finally, information also can show the prevalence of grandparents and other households raising young children, which also may vary greatly by neighborhood. Data may show the value of developing specific services and supports for grandparents raising children in some neighborhoods, where as many as one in eight children is being raised by a grandparent.

- Young children and parental work status:

  Two parent families with children under 6 where both spouses work
  Two parent families where one spouse works
  Two parent families where neither spouse works
  Single parent families where the head of household works
  Single parent families where the head of household does not work

  Information is available through the census not only on parental work status for all children, but parental work status in households with at least one child below the age of six. This information is useful in providing some broad estimates of the need for child care for young children, as well as getting a picture of the work status in families.

- Poverty and income status of young children

  Number of children under six living in poverty
  Number of children under six living at or below 185% of poverty

  Again, the census offers information on the income level, in terms of percentage of poverty, of children's households. This information can be used to determine the need for services designed to help children in low income and economically struggling families. The Head Start program covers children only up to 100% of poverty, while the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and free and reduced meals programs cover children up to 185% of poverty. Most state Medicaid/SCHIP programs cover children up to 200% of poverty. Families who earn less than 200% of poverty generally are considered low income, with very limited discretionary income. Further, there is substantial evidence that children from lower-income backgrounds are much more likely to start kindergarten at a disadvantage than their more affluent peers.[10] The cut-off point of 185% of poverty often has been used to demarcate low-income and other children in this work (in part because schools keep records by eligibility for free and reduced price meals).

- Linguistically isolated households/immigrant households

  Number of linguistically isolated households

  While not available specifically for households with children 0-5, the census does provide information on households with children. Linguistically isolated households can give a good indication of the proportion of households for which particular attention should be given to dual language early childhood education opportunities and the need for bilingual staff in programs serving young children. In addition to

census data, schools maintain information on English language learners (ELL) that also can be helpful in assessing the proportion of English language learners among the early childhood population. Frequently, schools have also broken down this information by the specific home language spoken in homes where there are English language learners, which can be used to determine what specific languages into which information materials need to be translated and bilingual individuals recruited.

Note on all census data about young children and families. Much of this census data can be further disaggregated by race and ethnicity. This can help to show the extent to which gaps by race and ethnicity are reflective of neighborhood and segregation of low income families by place and the extent to which they permeate the community.

Other data sources on families. In addition to census data, there are other sources of administrative data that can identify the number and proportion of families with young children with additional challenges to raising children. These include birth record data, child protective service data, and even corrections system data.

- Births to adolescent women (17 or under)
  Births to mothers with less than a twelfth grade education

  Birth records are part of the vital statistics information systems maintained by all states and include parental address information that enables neighborhood-level disaggregation. Birth records contain information that makes it possible to determine the mother's age at the time of birth and also provides information on the mother's educational attainment level. Securing birth record information for neighborhood-level analysis requires developing agreements that meet HIPAA standards for confidentiality, but community data groups generally have been able to secure birth records and other vital statistics records for neighborhood-level analysis. Maternal education is recognized as one of the strongest correlates of future child educational and social success and is very useful in identifying families of young children where additional support may be needed to prepare their children for school, (such as family literacy programs).[11] Again, this information can be used to determine areas of greatest need and opportunity for programs targeted to specific groups (e.g. teen parents, non-literate parents) and to identify what racial and ethnic networking opportunities exist to engage and support them.

- Child abuse cases of children 0-5
  Children in foster care aged 0-5
  Registered foster parents

  State child protective service systems have information on the number of reported cases of child abuse, the number of confirmed cases of abuse, and the number of children in foster care. These numbers generally are available at the county level (although not necessarily for the specific 0-5 population of children). A number of community data groups also have been able to secure the data for neighborhood-level analysis, although parental addresses may be of uncertain value for children who have been in foster care for some length of time. Research experience has been that child abuse and placement rates are substantially higher within poor and minority neighborhoods, and the child state child protective service system often is viewed very differently by residents in those neighborhoods than in the rest of the

community. Gathering what information is available can be helpful in determining the degree to which child abuse and neglect or foster care affects a high proportion of children and families in the neighborhood. Information on registered foster parents also can show whether or not there is a good spatial match between foster homes and the children who are placed into foster care, which is important in developing effective reunification strategies. Two national initiatives—the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children and the Family-to-Family Initiative—have shown the value of redesigning child protective service systems to be much more neighborhood-based, and disaggregated child protective service data can help identify areas of need and opportunity.

- Children with an incarcerated parent

  Nationally, over two million children have at least one parent in prison or jail. Research is clear that children with an incarcerated parent are very vulnerable to a variety of poor outcomes, and young children in particular can experience trauma that affects their health and readiness to succeed in school. In most instances, state correctional systems have some information about the number of children that prisoners in their systems have and some information on the prisoner's living status at the time of apprehension. Much work has been done by NNIP partners in examining and mapping data about the state prison population – which shows that ex-offenders come very disproportionately from the highest poverty neighborhoods.[12] In these neighborhoods, incarceration can contribute greatly to single parenting, grandparents raising children, family economic insecurity, and child emotional trauma. It also can point to the need for family support groups for families with an incarcerated parent, parenting education programs in prisons, and re-entry strategies that address issues of family re-connection and support children of incarcerated parents.

Ready Early Childhood Services: Child care and pre-school data

Many young children, particularly of working parents, spend a large part of their day in care away from their parents. For infants and toddlers, this often is in the care of a relative or friend; for pre-schoolers it is more likely to be in a child care center or pre-school. These caregivers are, or could be, the child's second teacher. Strengthening the caregiving capacity of these caregivers not only helps young children and their families; it can also help build community and new leadership. At their best, these care arrangements further the child's development, link parents and children with other needed health, nutrition, and support services, and provide parents with connections and supports, including advice and modeling on child-raising practices. These care providers may be paid or unpaid. They also may receive state child care subsidies that support low and moderate income working families in paying for child care.

There are several different sources of information that can help to estimate the type and number of such care providers within neighborhoods and communities and the quality of care they provide. These sources include child care registration and licensure data, child care subsidy information, and child care workforce statistics.

In addition to child care, there also are pre-school programs that offer preparation for school for three- and four-year-olds. Currently, championed by the Pew Charitable Trusts and its pre-k-now initiative,

the Packard Foundation, and others, there is a great deal of push toward establishing high quality, voluntary, pre-school programs for all three and four year-old children.[13] Local administrative information about pre-school programs can be used to determine the number of pre-school programs in the community in relation to the number of children who could benefit from preschool. The most common preschool programs in communities are likely to be:

- the federal Head Start program, which serves children from families with incomes up to 100% of the poverty rate;
- pre-school programs or additions to funding for Head Start provided by the state or community to serve low income children;
- pre-school offered for children with disabilities and developmental delays, provided through the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its Part B program; and
- other pre-school programs explicitly designed to provide quality, developmentally enriched environments.

Just because a program calls itself a pre-school program, however, does not mean that it should be counted as providing the enriched developmental environment that is considered important to prepare young children, particularly low-income, young children, for school. To be considered a quality pre-school program, it is generally considered that a program should meet these minimum requirements: (1) operate at least three hours per day, five days a week, for nine months a year (e.g. a school-year basis), and (2) incorporate a curriculum and trained staff with a strong intentional learning environment and a low teacher to child ratio (with a per child expenditure of at least $3000 for a part-day, school-year program). This is the minimum level at which a program can really be considered to provide an enriched experience to prepare children for school.[14]

Child Care. As described in the discussion of family data, census data can help identify the number of children and families who may need child care. Administrative data regarding registered and licensed child care settings and child care subsidy payments for care can provide some information on current child care arrangements in the larger community, as well as providing information on care provision in neighborhoods. Unfortunately, however, this only speaks to one part of the child care system – it does not help to identify many of the more informal, family, friend, and neighbor care providers nor any home care providers who may be license- or registration-exempt. Nationally, estimates are that as much as half of all child care is provided by non-licensed or unregistered people, many of these relatives providing such care without compensation.[15] Strategies for supporting such care providers are likely to be different than those for the registered and licensed child care providers.

Care patterns also are known to be very different for 0-2 year olds than they are for 3-5 year olds, so it is important to seek to establish estimates for each. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative is conducting extensive surveys of 800 residents in each of its ten Making Connections sites that will obtain such estimates. This information may be of some use to other communities as they work to develop estimates of care arrangements for young children, and if they choose to conduct some parent surveys to get local data.

Currently, however, communities often can get substantial information about licensed and registered child care providers that provide the address of the center or home and the number of

children who can be served there (slots). They also often can get subsidy information on children served.

- Number of licensed child care centers and their slots
  Number of registered family day care homes and their slots

  Child care resource and referral agencies generally have information on all licensed child care centers and registered family day care homes, including contact information and facility address and the number of children they are equipped to serve. Center and registered family day care home sites can be mapped to show their location within neighborhoods and communities, and the capacities of centers can give a picture of the number of actual slots available for children. Family day care home providers are likely to list the number of children they are eligible to serve (e.g. up to 6 or up to 12) but may not be serving that number. In addition, registration does not necessarily mean that the home care provider is currently serving children. Still, this information can give an indication of the location of licensed and registered homes in a community and, when coupled with corresponding information on the number of young children, some indication of neighborhoods with greater or fewer child care resources.

  Child care and family day care homes may serve school-aged as well as pre-school-aged children, providing after-school care for working parents. Child care resource and referral agencies may have data bases that allow for some distinctions among child care providers in terms of the ages of children they serve.

  Different states have different regulations and requirements regarding licensing and registration of child care. It is important to understand the regulation system in determining the degree to which registration lists are likely to reflect child caregiving at both a community and neighborhood level.

- Children served by the child care subsidy program
  Amounts paid to child care providers in these programs
  Quality ratings of care providers

  In addition to registration and licensing information, all states have a child care subsidy program that provides supports to lower-income families in paying the costs of care. State programs vary widely in income eligibility levels for receiving subsidies and payment levels to providers of care. Increasingly, states are developing quality rating and reimbursement systems that also provide some indication of the experience and background of the program. This information also can be used to determine the degree to which the subsidy is reaching different neighborhoods where the eligible population of parents is greatest, and – where rating systems have been established – where families have greater or lesser access to higher rated care providers. This information can be used to identify areas where additional effort needs to be undertaken to expand or strengthen the existing child care community.

- Numbers of child care workers, pre-school teachers, and child care administrators and their average wages

  The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides information on employment according to a large

number of job classifications. Included in these classifications are child care workers, pre-school teachers, and child care administrators. This information is not available on a neighborhood basis, but is available on a metropolitan level. It can give some idea of the size of the paid child care workforce, as well as the current earnings level for that workforce. Increasingly, communities are conducting economic impact studies regarding child care that draw upon such information to make the case for supporting child care as an important source of economic activity.[16]

Pre-school. The census provides one question that has been used to give some general indication of the use of pre-school by parents of 3-5 year-olds. In addition, data from different public pre-school programs (Head Start, school developed or state-funded programs, and special education programs) represent public information that includes pre-school location and the number of children served, usually by their eligibility status.

- Census data on pre-school experiences

The census provides parental response to the question of whether their 3-5 year-olds had participated in a pre-school. The census leaves the definition of what constitutes a "pre-school experience" up to the respondent, so positive responses do not necessarily mean "quality" pre-school experiences. At the same time, the responses to this question have been used nationally and within states to show the pronounced differences in pre-school participation by household income level and also can identify significant differences by neighborhood.

- Data on current publicly-supported pre-school programs for 3-4 year olds focusing upon children under 185% of poverty and the numbers of children served:
  - Head start programs, their locations and numbers of slots
  - State-funded pre-school programs, their locations and number of slots
  - IDEA pre-school programs for children with disabilities, and number of slots
  - Other pre-school programs serving the community and neighborhoods, including NAEYC-accredited and other accredited programs.

At the community level, it should be possible to obtain relatively complete information on pre-school programs and their location, as well as the numbers of children they serve. Like child care data, however, it may be difficult to get information on the home addresses (or racial composition) of the children being served. Gathering such information will require going to multiple sources. Head Start will have information on Head Start; special education will have information on Part B IDEA pre-school programs; schools will have information on the programs they run; and others in the community will have information on other programs.

Those administering Head Start programs, school and special education pre-school programs, and working on early care and education issues in the community generally can be enlisted and collectively identify the universe of specific publicly-supported pre-school programs that meet a threshold definition of pre-school in terms of staffing, hours, and quality components and that generally serve lower-income families. While it may not be possible to determine if the children served are from the neighborhoods in which the programs are

located, it may be possible to make general estimates by locating the programs on a map. It also can be helpful to get information on the nature of the programs (1/2 day or full day, school-year or year-round, comprehensive in approach like Head Start in providing health referrals and family supports or more limited, concentrating primarily on classroom guidance and instruction), to assess further need. This information can be linked to information on the number of three- and four year-olds below 185% of poverty to produce some estimates on the degree to which slots exist in the neighborhoods to meet the needs of the children there for publicly-supported pre-school. Up to 185% of poverty, it generally can be assumed that most parents cannot afford to pay for a quality pre-school program for their child.

Ready Health Services: Child health and health services data

Children have a variety of needs for health services – to respond to injuries and illnesses, to be immunized from infectious diseases, to be checked for potential health problems, and to be treated when health needs are identified. Young children need health insurance coverage and a "medical home," or regular source of pediatric care, to get the kind of comprehensive care they need. In the poorest neighborhoods in the country, Medicaid and SCHIP (federal and state programs that make health insurance available for children) are likely to provide coverage for the majority of all young children (nationally, one-third of all 0-5 children are enrolled in Medicaid!). Medicaid and SCHIP data can help provide a picture of the current health services and the health needs of young children in Making Connections.

Child health begins even before birth, and information about babies is important for planning purposes. Birth records provide information about mothers' receipt of prenatal services and infant health, including the baby's birthweight. Birth records offer additional information that can be useful to communities, both in identifying special areas of concern and in identifying points of contact. It is at the time of birth that the first information becomes available that covers almost all young children, and the birth of a child also provides the opportunity for offering additional supports to the family.

Finally, there are other data sources, such as immunization records, screens for lead poisoning, and participation in early intervention (Part C of IDEA, the infants and toddlers act) that also provide very important information about young children's health status.

Birth records. Birth records (part of the vital statistics kept by all states, including birth and death certificates) and Medicaid/SCHIP data provide basic health information.

- Birth record information on entry into prenatal care
  Birth record information on low birthweight
  Birth record information on smoking/drinking during pregnancy

  Early prenatal care is generally a good measure of the family's recognition and use of primary and preventive health services, with late or no entry into prenatal care a clear warning sign of child health concerns. Yet this is not uniformly the correct assumption. Rates of entry into prenatal care are lower among Hispanics, particularly first-generation Hispanics, although their birth outcomes are generally quite good,

although there still should be efforts to increase use of prenatal care in the Hispanic community. Breaking prenatal care information down by race as well as by neighborhood, in particular, can be very useful in choosing targets and strategies.

Low birthweight is a sign of prematurity and general vulnerability and may indicate a need for additional health services. It also can point to a need for parent services that address social as well as medical health concerns.

Birth records also provide information on smoking and drinking during pregnancy. They can be very useful for identifying specific population groups and neighborhoods where smoking cessation campaigns and supports – particularly for young women of child-bearing age, are warranted. Smoking has a very strong effect on low birthweight (one contribution to the low low-birthweight level among Hispanic women may be that they are much less likely to be smokers than either White, non-Hispanic women or African American women).

Medicaid and SCHIP data. All children need access to medical services, including a consistent pediatric practitioner that provides primary and preventive health care. Further, such well-child care and periodic screening of young children should include anticipatory guidance to parents and be broad-based, including vision, hearing, and dental services and detecting and addressing special health conditions (including asthma and autism) and developmental delays. America's health care system involves a mixture of employer-sponsored health insurance, individual purchase of health care, and public health care. The federal Medicaid and State Child Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP) provide a public health insurance package for children, in most states at least up to 185% of poverty and with Medicaid coverage at least up to 133% of poverty for young children.

Nationally, approximately one-third of all young children (0-5) in America are covered under Medicaid, a figure that has grown dramatically over the last decade, as federal coverage has expanded and as employer-based family coverage has declined. Further, Medicaid provides a very comprehensive set of health services to children, including Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) provisions to entitle children to comprehensive screening and needed follow-up services (state SCHIP programs which involve extensions of Medicaid also have EPSDT, but state SCHIP programs that have other insurance packages generally do not). States vary significantly, however, in both their eligibility levels under Medicaid and SCHIP and, both through policy and practice, what services children actually receive under these programs. Medicaid and SCHIP data, particularly in conjunction with other data, can be a very useful source of information on coverage levels and may also point to geographic areas where there are coverage gaps.

Ideally, communities would want to know the numbers and proportions of young children who have health insurance coverage, who have a regular source of medical care (or medical home), and who receive primary and preventive health services. Unfortunately, while there are some estimates of child health coverage at the state level, there is no data set on the overall coverage level of children by community or neighborhood. At the same time, it is possible to develop some estimates both of the likely eligible young child population for Medicaid and SCHIP and the actual number of children enrolled.

- Enrollment information on Medicaid and SCHIP
- Participation information regarding EPSDT, well child care and follow-up services

  Census information provides estimates of the number of young children eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP at both the neighborhood and the larger community level. It may only be possible to obtain actual enrollment data for Medicaid and SCHIP at the community (county or metropolitan) level, but this can give some indication of the degree to which Medicaid and SCHIP have reached the populations they are designed to serve. While this information may not be available on a child age basis, a rough estimate can be established using state EPSDT (early periodic, screening, diagnosis, and treatment) data, which is reported on by child age.

  Some communities may be able to enter into agreements to do more detailed analysis of Medicaid and SCHIP data (in many states, this involves two different data systems), including information by child home address. Through billing codes, it also may be possible to determine the use of EPSDT and other Medicaid services. EPSDT data, in particular, can provide an indication of the degree to which children receive primary and preventive health care and receive follow-up services to identified special needs.

Other health and developmental data on young children. In addition to Medicaid and SCHIP data, all state public health departments are required to maintain some information on immunizations of children and lead poisoning. Such information is important as an indicator of child health and well-being in its own right, but it also is an indicator of the extent to which children are receiving regular health services. State laws also may require registries of certain other diseases or conditions. While the quality of the data varies and is generally not based upon examination of the total child population, it can be very helpful both in identifying potential epidemiological "hot spots" and in determining specific geographic areas where more screening needs to be conducted. Another data set closely connected to health data is the data regarding early intervention services for infants and toddlers with or at risk of developmental delays. Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children birth to two are entitled to services to address developmental delays, including screening and assessment services. States have the option of covering children at risk of developmental delays as well as those with manifested conditions. Research indicates that from 8-12 percent of all infants and toddlers have some significant developmental delays, and that these figures are higher within low-income populations. At the same time, nationally Part C serves only about 2% of all infants and toddlers in the country (this varies widely by state). While an entitlement, parents often have to take substantial initiative to learn about and access Part C, and there often is little outreach from Part C programs or many referrals made by pediatric practitioners to Part C.

- Immunization records for children age two

  Immunization data of children 18-36 months of age is collected through public health clinics and centers, and data are available in all states through this source that provide information regarding the numbers and percentages of children seen whose immunizations are up to date. Since these health settings generally serve lower-income populations and lower-income neighborhoods, they can provide an indication

of further immunization effort needs. The data is available on a health center basis within counties. Particularly where immunization rates fall below a certain level, the likelihood for an outbreak of an immunizable disease go up greatly.

- Lead screening rates and positive lead screens for children under six

  The federal Medicaid program requires lead screening for young children (0-5) as part of EPSDT, but actual lead screening of children does not uniformly occur. Public health departments do maintain records of all screenings of young children for elevated blood levels and the results of those screenings. This information can be geo-coded and, coupled with data about the child population, mapped to show where screening rates are high or low for children and where the rate of elevated blood lead levels among those screened is high. Lead poisoning is very harmful, particularly for very young children, with lifelong effects. Lead poisoning is most common through exposure to lead paint and lead paint dust, from homes built before 1950, before lead was prohibited as an ingredient in paint. Geo-coded data on lead screening and findings of elevated blood levels generally points to specific poorer and older neighborhoods for high rates. These also can be compared with information on the age of housing in those neighborhoods. Lead screening rates can be crudely examined by using the number of screenings contrasted with the number of children 0-6 from the census. Most lead poisoning can be prevented through covering up lead paint and removing existing dust and paint chips. GIS analysis can help focus attention to areas of highest need.

- Participation of 0-2 year-olds in early intervention (Part C) services

  Given the research and the underlying demographics, the prevalence of developmental delays is expected to be higher in poor neighborhoods than more affluent ones. The actual use of such services, however, often is based upon parents knowing about and having the resources to access those services. Mapping participation in Part C services by neighborhood and establishing use rates can help determine whether Part C services are reaching the population for which they are intended or whether there are particular areas which are underserved. This information can be used to develop additional outreach activities into those underserved areas.

Ready Schools: Elementary school data

Schools have a responsibility to educate all children, regardless of what children "know and can do" at the time of school entry. School responsibilities include high instructional standards, after-school programs, parent involvement, and community engagement. Even before children start school, schools can provide information to parents to prepare their children for school, work with child care providers and pre-school programs to help align developmental activities, and provide opportunities to prepare children and their parents for the transition to school.

Schools also collect a great deal of information about students, including attendance, grade advancement or retention, and test score information. Some school districts assess children at the time of entry into kindergarten, but others do not have a common assessment of kindergartners.

At the same time, through the provisions of No Child Left Behind, all schools are required to both test report on test scores for children starting in fourth grade, also providing those scores by race, special education, free-and-reduced-price meals, and English-language learning status.

Proficient reading by fourth grade is recognized as one of the strongest predictors of subsequent educational success and itself is a "lagging indicator" of a child's readiness at the time of entry into kindergarten. Research suggests that up to half the gap in school achievement in later grades by race and ethnicity already is evident at the time of school entry. This does not mean that schools do not have a responsibility to narrow gaps in student achievement, but it does mean that reducing those gaps before school entry makes the ability to close the gap while in school much more achievable.[17]

In some instances, it may be possible to work with the public school system to obtain information on students by child home address. In other instances, the best that communities may be able to do is to get information by elementary school. Even if the information is only at a school level, this school information often can tell a good deal about the education of children in the neighborhood. School-level information can be used to compare schools with different student populations to determine differences. Depending upon the degree to which elementary schools largely serve their own neighborhoods, school data also can provide information about students in the neighborhood.

- Student assessments at kindergarten entry

  Some school districts administer tests or assessments of children shortly after the time of school entry. These tests may primarily measure pre-literacy or cognitive skills, or they may be comprehensive in assessing social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical development as well. They may or may not have strong inter-rater reliability.

  Communities may be able to work with schools to examine these assessment scores by student home address, which, depending upon the assessment used, can provide information on gaps in development by child home neighborhood, as well as by school, race, and free-and-reduced-price meal status. It is important in being clear what the specific assessment measures are and the degree to which they represent a reliable measure across students and schools. Available data, however, can be used to present initial indications of gaps or specific neighborhoods where additional attention on child development should occur, as well as to point to ways the assessments that are done could be strengthened. The field of kindergarten entry assessments is growing, as states and communities are developing such assessments, not only for developing baselines and tracking trends but also for identifying individual student needs and developing classroom teaching strategies.[18]

- Elementary grade test scores, including fourth grade reading proficiency as a sentinel measure

  The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to provide detailed information on test scores of students, starting in 4th grade. Federal law requires that this information should be available on a school basis and be additionally broken down by race, free-and-reduced price lunch status (185% of poverty level family income or below), special education status, and English as a second language status (although not by cross-tabulations among these variables).

Particularly when coupled with other information about children described above and analyzed on a neighborhood basis, this information can serve as a lagging indicator of school readiness. Where kindergarten assessment information is available about children and children can be tracked over time, it also can be used as a measure of how well strategies are working. Since states are required to develop measures of student proficiency at fourth grade for all students in the state, it also is possible to compare neighborhood and community scores with the state (states use different instruments and have different metrics for determining proficiency, so cross-state comparisons are not possible using the direct data from states).

- Elementary school attendance and proportion of children in early elementary grades missing more than 20 days of school

  Attendance is also routinely collected and reported on by schools. Again, low attendance is a signal of future educational problems and may be an indicator of lack of preparation before school starts. High levels of student absence (more than twenty days per year) in the early elementary grades also represent an early warning sign that schools and communities can use to step in to help families and their young students get on track.[19] Where data are available for GIS work, communities also can examine student attendance by neighborhood, as well as by school. Although schools maintain and report on attendance, however, in many districts this information remains at the school site level and does not track students across schools, when they move during the year from one school to another. Integrating school attendance data with other school data and keeping track of it on a student basis, and not only on a school basis, can correct this problem and provide much fuller information on early elementary school attendance issues.

- Other elementary school information, including: early elementary grade retention, parent involvement (attendance at parent-child conferences), elementary school disciplinary actions, and special education use (including designation as behavior-disordered)
  Schools also usually maintain information on grade retention, parents participating in parent-teacher conferences, school disciplinary actions, and students in special education. All these can contribute to gaining a better understanding of differences across schools and students from different neighborhoods in their involvement and engagement in school.

- Kindergarten-school transition activities

  Schools vary in the degree to which they reach out to parents, child care providers, and others in the community to provide information that can help in the transition to school. There are a number of ways that schools can support school readiness activities and help align preparation in the early learning years with school expectations and early elementary curricula.[20] Many schools have kindergarten round-ups, but there are many other activities schools can perform, including home visits, regular meetings with child care providers, scheduled open houses for pre-school children to go to school, and newsletters and other resource materials provided to parents. This is one area where community data developers can conduct scans of current practice by meeting with school officials to identify current transition practices. These can be used to provide a baseline of the degree of school

involvement in developing successful transitions to school and to suggest areas for parent-school-community collaborations (see Appendix One for protocol for conducting such a community scan).

Ready Communities: Neighborhood safety, resource, and support data

The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," stresses the importance for young children and their families of having a nurturing community that looks out for them and provides a range of developmental opportunities. This starts with community safety but it also includes recreational and cultural opportunities and a dense network of systems supporting families in raising and nurturing their children. It includes exposure to a rich language and a variety of stimuli that encourage exploration and reading.

- Crime data
  Crime data regarding young children
  Drug-related crimes
  Domestic violence data

  Crime reports offer data that can be analyzed by location and used to identify areas where there is substantial criminal activity. This crime data can be further broken down by the type of criminal reports, including some that more directly involve children, including domestic violence reports and crime against children. Drug-related crimes also can show areas where drug activity is high.

- Programs and services supporting parents – parent education, home visiting, family support, parenting peer support networks, recreation and literacy programs for young children

Most communities have a wide variety of programs – both publicly supported and privately supported and ranging from very formal to very informal structures – to support parents and young children. These include parent education programs, home visiting programs, and peer support networks. Generally, 2-1-1 hotlines have information about some of these programs, although the more voluntary and informal programs available often are not listed and change rapidly within a community. There is no administrative data set that will provide this information, but communities can develop community scans to seek to identify such resources and their location within a community. Research for youth development programs has often shown that the array of program options available to youth in more affluent communities is much greater than those available in poor communities. This is particularly true for normative programs (swimming classes, girl scouts, soccer leagues, dance classes), while certain types of targeted "prevention programs" (teen pregnancy prevention, delinquency prevention programs) are more likely to be located within poor neighborhoods. With respect to young children and their families, parenting education programs may be more likely to exist in poor neighborhoods, while a range of normative activities (tumbling tots, family swimming nights, parent co-ops) may be more likely to exist in more affluent neighborhoods. Conducting community scans in these areas can reveal differences in the range of opportunities available to families with young children. These scans can be done through interviewing key informants most likely to know about such resources and they can also be done by interviewing a representative sample of parents for their knowledge of resources in the

neighborhood and community available to their young children.

- School yards and structures
  Parks and playgrounds
  Libraries
  Faith institutions
  Museums and galleries

  Young children and their families need places and opportunities to get together in settings that are "family friendly" and provide children with stimuli and activities. This includes playgrounds and parks, libraries, and museums and galleries. In many instances, faith institutions offer places for families with young children to meet and provide opportunities for family activities, both during regular worship times and throughout the week.

  Schools in inner-city neighborhoods often have smaller outside areas and their physical environments may be less conducive to serving as meeting areas than suburban and other schools. School yards in some inner-city schools also may not be considered safe areas for children and families to come, after school hours. The same may hold for parks and playgrounds that do exist.

  Communities can map all of these different potential "family friendly" congregating spots by neighborhood. This can go as far as determining such things as the amount of park, playground, and school yard area available per child within specific geographic areas (e.g. square foot per young child). Communities also can determine which spaces actually are being used for family activities and considered safe, by observing their use over the course of a day or days.

  Such information can identify areas where additional recreational spaces or bigger school yards or space for family meetings is most needed within a community.[21]

Conclusion: Using data to help achieve the goal of ready children

The preceding sections have described a variety of data that can be collected and analyzed at the neighborhood as well as the community level to help improve school readiness. This is not an inclusive list, but it is one where some significant analysis has already occurred that has proved fruitful in some communities in focusing attention and spurring action at a neighborhood as well as a community level. The matrix on the following two pages provides a briefer summary of these different data elements, their sources, and potential uses.

Summary Matrix of Data Elements, Sources, and Potential Uses		
Data Elements	Sources	Potential Uses
Ready Families		
Number of children by age	Census	Use as denominator for establishing percentages Use in determining areas with high proportions of children Use in identifying diversity issues
Households with young children	Census	Use in identifying single parents, grandparents raising children
Young children and parental work status	Census	Use in determining potential demands for child care
Poverty and income status of children	Census	Use in identifying needs based upon economic circumstances
Linguistically isolated households	Census	Use in identifying needs for ESL programs and for programs offered in languages other than English
Births to adolescent girls/low-educated mothers	Vital Records	Use in identifying particular parenting needs and programs for age-appropriate programs for new parents
Child abuse cases, foster care cases	Child Welfare Records	Use in identifying need for neighborhood-based services in the child protection/child welfare system
Children with an incarcerated parent	Department of Corrections records	Use in developing community strategies to support returning ex-offenders and provide supports to children and families with an incarcerated parent
Ready Early Childhood Services		
Pre-school data	Head Start, Part B of IDEA, state and school district data, Census data	Use in assessing need for and location of pre-school programs
Child care data	Child care resource and referral data, child care subsidy records	Use in identifying need for additional child care services and in locating potential child care resources in community

Summary Matrix of Data Elements, Sources, and Potential Uses		
Data Elements	Sources	Potential Uses
Ready Health Services		
Entry into prenatal care, low birthweight, and smoking/drinking during pregnancy	Vital Statistics records	Use in identifying prenatal care services and their impact upon healthy births
Health care coverage and use	Medicaid, SCHIP, and EPSDT data	Use in determining degree of coverage of children under public health programs and actual use of services (EPSDT)
Immunizations	Department of Public Health	Use in determining need for additional strategies to ensure children receive primary and preventive care
Elevated blood lead levels	Department of Public Health	Use in determining need for additional strategies to reduce lead in children's environments
Early intervention participation	State department administering Part C	Use in determining where additional outreach and early intervention services are needed for children with developmental delays
Ready Schools		
Kindergarten assessment data	School district records	Use in determining relative need for school readiness activities within community
Elementary grade test scores	School district records, NCLB report	Use in identifying schools and geographic areas requiring additional efforts to raise achievement and close the achievement gap
Elementary attendance experiences	School district records	Use in establishing early intervention strategies with particular students or in particular schools, based upon student absences
Other elementary school activities	School district records and individual school surveys	Use in identifying where additional parent, school, and community activities might occur
Ready Communities		
Crime data	Police records	Use in identifying areas that jeopardize child safety
Parent and community program information	Various administrative sources, 2-1-1	Use in identifying neighborhood gathering places and sources for community support and activity, and gaps in such resources

Chapter Four

Analyzing and Presenting Neighborhood Data as a Tool for Action: Some Examples from the Field

People interested in conducting neighborhood-level school readiness data analyses do not have to start from scratch. In fact, there are examples from NNIP and other community organizations from around the country that can be useful in indicating what types of data analysis can help to identify specific early childhood needs and opportunities by neighborhood. Further, they can be helpful in showing how data can be presented clearly and forcefully to spur action.

This section of the toolkit provides excerpts from reports and neighborhood data presentations produced by two NNIP partners that have helped to inform and influence early childhood and school readiness actions. Much of their analysis can be adapted and used in other communities and also can be employed in making the case for doing this important neighborhood-level analysis in order to develop effective school readiness strategies.

A. Des Moines' School Readiness Data

The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC), an NNIP member since 2001, is involved in policy development and advocacy on early childhood and school readiness issues at the state, national, and local levels. CFPC is part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative and has been responsible for collecting and analyzing data at the neighborhood level for that Initiative. CFPC has been able to secure and analyze data related to young children and their families on a census-tract level basis from the following sources:

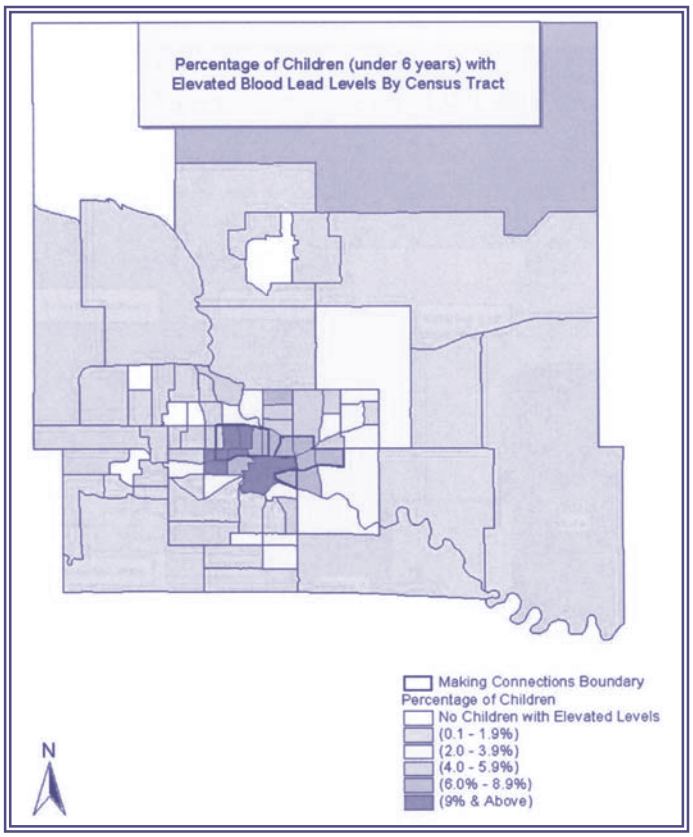
- Census data;
- Vital records (birth records) data;
- Lead screening of young children (0-6) data;
- Child abuse and neglect data;
- Child care data;
- Preschool data;
- Survey data from the Making Connections cross-site survey; and
- Des Moines public schools data on elementary school children, including kindergarten entry assessments, early elementary attendance levels, and student test scores.

CFPC has developed a variety of reports analyzing this information, with an emphasis upon working with community groups and coalitions to use the information gathered to inform policy decisions and spur action to improve children's health and readiness for success in school. The following describe several different data analyses that have been conducted by CFPC on school readiness.

1. Des Moines: Neighborhoods and Elevated Blood Lead Levels

Des Moines has an active Lead Poisoning Prevention Coalition of groups, led by the Polk County Health Department, to work to reduce the overall percentage of children who had elevated blood lead levels in the community. In 2005, CFPC conducted a GIS analysis of the lead screening data to show, on a census tract basis, where positive screening rates were highest. Using the number of children 0-5 as the denominator, CFPC also examined the actual screening rates by census tract to identify tracts where positive screening rates were high but the overall screening rates were not reaching a large proportion of children.

This information has been used by the Lead Poisoning Prevention Coalition to conduct additional outreach and targeting efforts to specific neighborhoods where positive screens are high but screening rates have been low. The analysis has been an integral part of a newly-funded effort to reduce lead poisoning. The map on the following page provides a visual description of where elevated



blood level rates are highest within Polk County (primarily in the inner-city Des Moines census tracts).

In addition, the overall screening rate for children helps to show the need for such outreach. Below is a list of specific census tracts with the highest positive screens that also shows screening rates for children in those tracts. This has been used to do additional outreach to parents. The Table below shows the census tracts with the highest percentages of positive screens, the percentage of pre-1950 housing stock, and the actual percentage of 0-5 year olds screened. While pre-1950 housing stock is related to percentages of positive screens, the data clearly showed that this was not the only factor to consider in identifying areas with high lead screening and abatement needs.

Des Moines Census Tracts with Highest Rates of Positive Lead Screens (>10.0 ug/dL)

Census Tract	Children 0-5	% Tested	% Tested Positive	% Housing pre-1950
26	316	23.8%	11.0%	74.0%
12	374	30.1%	10.3%	70.9%
28	325	16.6%	9.8%	83.0%
51	225	26.7%	9.5%	25.9%
29	306	15.1%	9.2%	61.6%
11	4.9	21.7%	9.0%	50.9%
27	330	22.6%	9.0%	61.6%
Rest of Polk County		13.1%	2.6%	32.6%

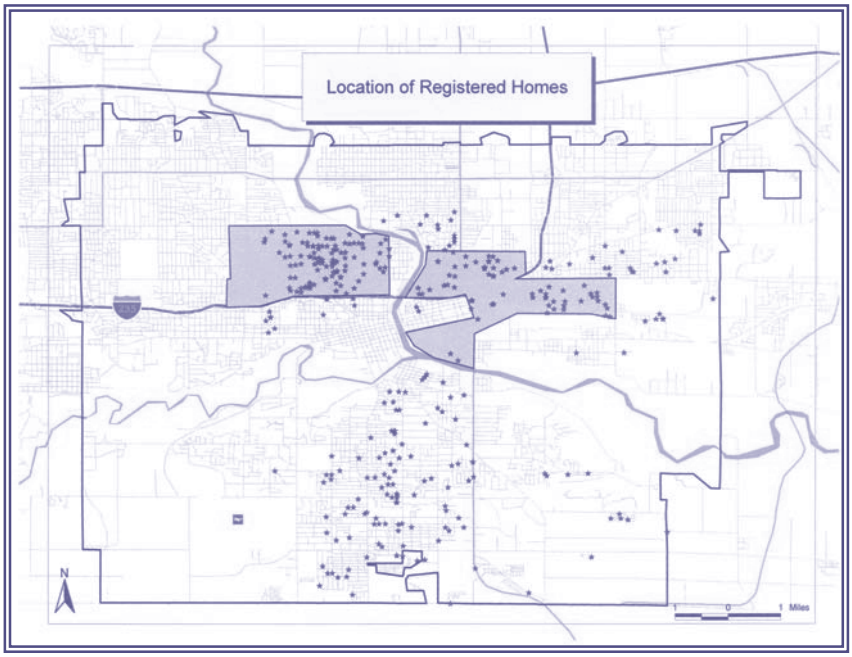
2. Des Moines: The Child Care Provider Community

The Child and Family Policy Center also has worked with the child care community to help determine where child care centers and family day care homes are located in the Des Moines. Through Child Care Resource and Referral, CFPC obtained address locations for all licensed child care centers and their number of child care slots, and all registered family home care providers and the number of children they were registered to offer care. CCR&R also provided some address information on non-registered providers.

CFPC mapped these centers and registered homes, with a particular attention to looking at their prevalence within the identified high poverty, Making Connections neighborhoods in relation to the number of young children living there. Making Connections neighborhoods were the focus of community actions to improve school readiness.

This analysis showed that, relative to the young child population, Making Connections neighborhoods had a disproportionate share of Center slots and, in particular, family home care providers (although this did not mean that these Centers and homes were providing care for children from the Making Connections neighborhoods).

The analysis helped make the case that child care represented a significant part of the economic life in Making Connections neighborhoods and that supporting and strengthening these providers could support and strengthen the community. The analysis did not point to a particular shortage of available child care or family home settings for children, but did help direct the community to focus additional attention and support to building provider networks within the neighborhood to support one another and receive information to expand their developmental work. The analysis helped focus attention on the important role the child care community could play in building community and the value of enlisting them in community action.



3. Des Moines: Pre-School Development and Kindergarten Entry Assessment Scores

Through state and community funding, the Polk County Empowerment Board received substantial new resources in 2005 and 2006 to expand pre-school programs. Prior funds for pre-school had gone almost equally to Des Moines and to the non-Des Moines communities within Polk County, and there had been a general assumption that the needs were equivalent across the county. Most school districts in the county employ the same kindergarten entry assessment tool, DIBELS.

In 2005, CFPC was able to use the results from DIBELS scores to show that three-quarters of the kindergarten students that start school requiring substantial intervention were within the Des Moines School District. Further, by geo-mapping the DIBELS scores, CFPC showed DIBELS scores for students within the highest poverty census tracts in the city and school district. The Table below provides a short summary of the findings from this analysis of DIBELS scores and their relation to other poverty and risk factors.

DIBELS Entry Assessment Scores by Polk County School Districts and within High Risk Neighborhoods

DIBELS Entry Assessment Scores by Polk County School District

School District	# Kindergartners	# Scoring as Requiring Substantial Intervention	% Requiring Substantial Intervention
Des Moines	2,287	713	31.2%
• Highest Risk Census Tracts	569	220	38.7%
• Other Census Tracts	1,718	493	28.7
West Des Moines	590	88	14.9%
Johnston	388	29	7.5%
Southeast Polk	379	70	18.5%
Saydel	85	3	3.5%
Urbandale, NE Polk, Ankeny	911	137 (e)	15.0% (e)
Total	4,795	1,063	22.2%

Characteristics of Highest Risk Census Tracts, Compared with Polk County

	Highest Risk	All Polk County
Single Parent Families	46.6%	24.4%
Families with Children in Poverty	27.7%	8.3%
25+ Population without High School Diploma	27.7%	11.7%
Low Birthweight Births	8.6%	6.7%
% of Births to Adolescents	6.7%	4.3%
Young Male (18-34) Justice System Involvement	11.6%	6.6%
DIBELS Kindergarten Scores Showing Need for Substantial Intervention	38.7%	22.2%

CFPC was also able to geographically map current pre-school program slots (although children were not assigned to pre-school geographically) to help identify where new pre-school programs could best be placed. Coupled with the DIBELS data, this mapping has been important to the Polk County Empowerment Board in deciding where to locate new preschool programs.

B. The Providence Plan

The Providence Plan (ProvPlan), a member of NNIP since 1995, has been using data to inform decision-making and drive local change since its inception in 1992. Through its *Information for Change* agenda, ProvPlan is working to improve the scope, quality, accessibility, and usability of information available to the Providence community.

Every facet of ProvPlan has benefited from the organization's focus on local area analysis to foster community change. Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) is one such program.

R2LP is a school readiness program with the vision that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. R2LP has an array of programs and activities under its purview to help ensure this vision. These include: high quality professional development for English and Spanish-speaking early care and education providers, a 30-member AmeriCorps program with partner sites that includes all 10 branches of the public library system and community-based agencies, eight Early Reading First sites destined to become centers of educational excellence, and myriad activities designed to reach out to and engage families so that they are better prepared to help their children transition into kindergarten.

While R2LP is a citywide initiative that supports programs in and distributes resources to all of the city's 25 neighborhoods, R2LP directs investments to eight particular neighborhoods, identified as the "R2LP target area." R2LP is a strong believer in the value of evidence-based decision-making and conducted a comparative geo-spatial analysis of ten indicators related to child and maternal well-being to define the target area (see Table 1 below and Figure 1 on next page). The decision to develop target neighborhoods was rooted in the belief that R2LP should devote a sizable portion of its limited resources to areas in the city where research shows that investments are most needed and where they will have the greatest impact.

Table 1: R2LP indicators used to target investments in neighborhoods

Indicator	Source of Data
Number of children under 6 years of age	Census 2000
Children under age 6 as a percent of neighborhood population	Census 2000
Children under age 6 as a percent of City population	Census 2000
Births to teens	RI Department of Health, 1996-2000
Birth to single women	RI Department of Health, 1996-2000
Births to women receiving delayed prenatal care	RI Department of Health, 1996-2000
Births to women with fewer than 12 years of education	RI Department of Health, 1996-2000
Linguistically isolated households	Census 2000
Early childhood residential mobility	RI Department of Health, 1997-2001
Children living in poverty	Census 2000

Figure 1- Level of distress based on 10 indicators overlain by neighborhood

Table 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PROVIDENCE AND R2LP TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS

Providence Neighborhood	Children under age 6 2000	Percent of n'hood population	Percent of city's under-6 population	Percent of teen births '96-'00	Births to single moms '96-'00	Delayed pre-natal care '96-'00	Residents with < 12 years of education '96-'00	Linguistic isolation 2000	Early childhood mobility '97-'01	Percent under 6 in poverty 2000
CITYWIDE Data	**15,210**	**8.8%**	**100.0%**	**17.1%**	**58.4%**	**32.7%**	**35.5%**	**17.2%**	**49.2%**	**40.5%**
1. Elmwood	1,383	12.0%	9.1%	20.0%	66.9%	38.4%	41.2%	27.9%	51.9%	47.2%
2. Federal Hill	631	7.9%	4.1%	19.3%	69.4%	38.6%	41.5%	14.5%	53.4%	55.2%
3. Hartford	814	13.0%	5.4%	19.6%	62.6%	33.5%	43.0%	15.6%	52.0%	60.9%
4. Lower S. Providence	695	12.1%	4.6%	21.5%	74.9%	37.7%	42.3%	24.4%	62.9%	52.6%
5. Olneyville	886	13.6%	5.8%	21.4%	72.4%	38.1%	51.3%	27.4%	58.8%	54.4%
6. Smith Hill	676	10.9%	4.4%	19.6%	66.2%	39.8%	46.7%	21.9%	55.1%	43.1%
7. Upper S. Providence	484	9.7%	3.2%	21.7%	73.6%	36.3%	39.0%	18.5%	57.1%	44.0%
8. West End	1,823	11.1%	12.0%	21.6%	69.3%	41.8%	49.5%	25.4%	54.0%	48.4%

Using indicators to inform action

R2LP continues to devote considerable resources to research and data collection. The most ambitious research project to date was the 2005 release of *How Ready Is Providence? Advancing a community conversation about school readiness in Providence*. The report examines 24 indicators that figure prominently in a child's health and readiness for school.

R2LP created a 15-member committee comprised of residents, child care providers, health professionals, academics, and policy experts to help identify and develop school readiness indicators. Through many sessions, the committee developed the 24 indicators included in the report. At the outset of the process, R2LP sought to track all indicators at the neighborhood level but instructed committee members to consider issues on the basis of their importance to school readiness and independent of whether or not data were readily available. R2LP decided that if an issue merited inclusion in the report, it would work in the coming years to gather data and measure progress.

As shown in Table 2 (following page), of the 24 indicators selected, data were available for nine of them at the neighborhood level, meaning that R2LP can compare rates between the 25 Providence neighborhoods. For six of the indicators, data were available at the city level only. For the remaining nine indicators, very limited or no data were available at the time of the report.

Table 2 – R2LP's Indicators of School Readiness from *How Ready is Providence?*

Indicator	Level of Analysis: Neighborhood	City	Very limited or no data
Category A: Readiness of parents, caregivers and teachers			
Education level of parents	√		
Earning levels of families	√		
Percentage of linguistically isolated households	√		
Educational attainment of caregivers in center-based and family-care settings			√
Percentage of early-care teachers taking professional development courses in child development			√
Percentage of kindergarten and first grade teachers who are certified in early childhood education		√	
Average wages of caregivers compared to elementary school teachers		√	
Percentage of early-care and education staff trained in cultural competence			√
Percentage of teaching staff at the primary school level trained in cultural competence			√
Category B: Child development and well-being			
Percentages of children in regulated, licensed settings and in legal, non-certified settings		√	
Number and types of curricula being used in regulated preschool settings			√
Number of literacy requirements now written into DCYF licensing regulations for child-care providers			√
Children receiving academic and literacy assessments through their early-care providers			√
Children receiving screenings of speech, language, hearing, vision, and early childhood development through their early-care providers		√	
Children referred for early intervention services or special education	√		
Children with current immunizations Children receiving dental care by age 5	√		√
Category C: The child's environment			
Social connectedness of parents/guardians to their community			√
Library usage by families with young children	√		
Children with incarcerated parents	√		
Indicated cases of child abuse and neglect	√		
Children under age 5 requiring hospitalization as a result of unintentional injuries		√	
Children under age 6 with elevated blood lead levels	√		
Families receiving home visits through the RI Department of Health		√	

Findings

The analysis presented in the report reveals that there are indeed real differences across the city's neighborhoods. But while the data point to significant challenges for the children of certain neighborhoods, some of the findings were, in fact, encouraging.

For example, lead poisoning among children has dropped dramatically throughout Providence. The rates of elevated blood lead levels dropped in all but one neighborhood between 2000 and 2003, with one-third of all neighborhoods experiencing a decline of 50% or more. The highest concentrations of affected children remain in the neighborhoods with the lowest incomes, where children are more likely to live in poorly maintained rental housing.

Many of the indicators in the report are heavily linked to the issue of poverty. Children living in poverty, especially those living in poverty for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems – and experience difficulty in school – than those who do not. With the high cost of living, even families whose incomes are considerably higher than 100 percent of the federal poverty level find it difficult to meet all of their basic living expenses.

Figure 2 – Children under age 6 with elevated blood levels (figure 25, page 64 in report)

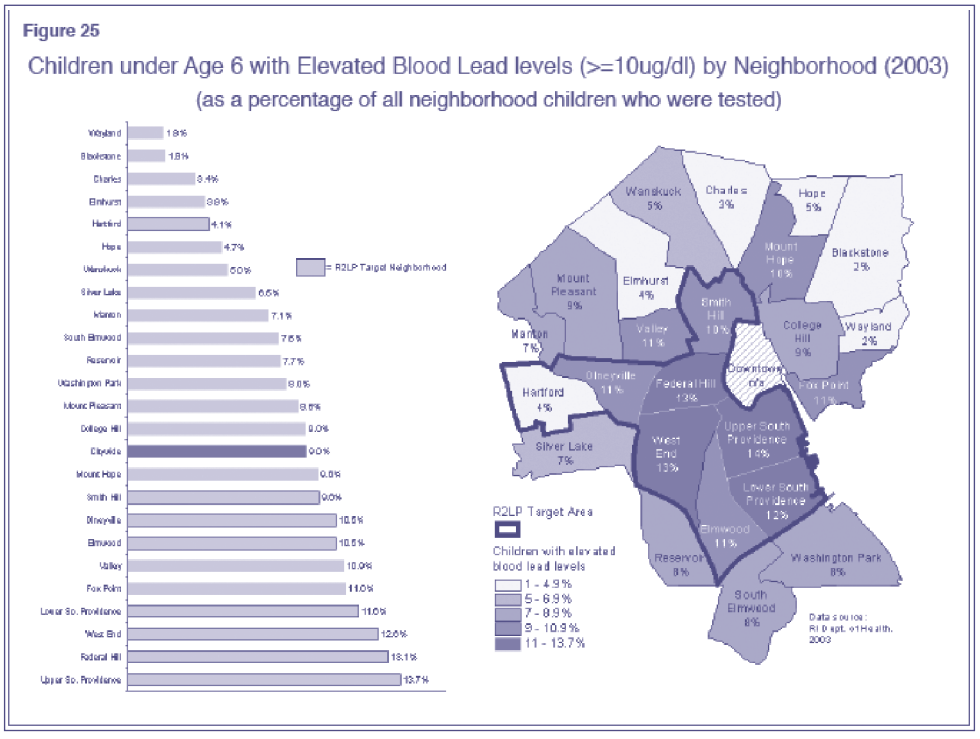
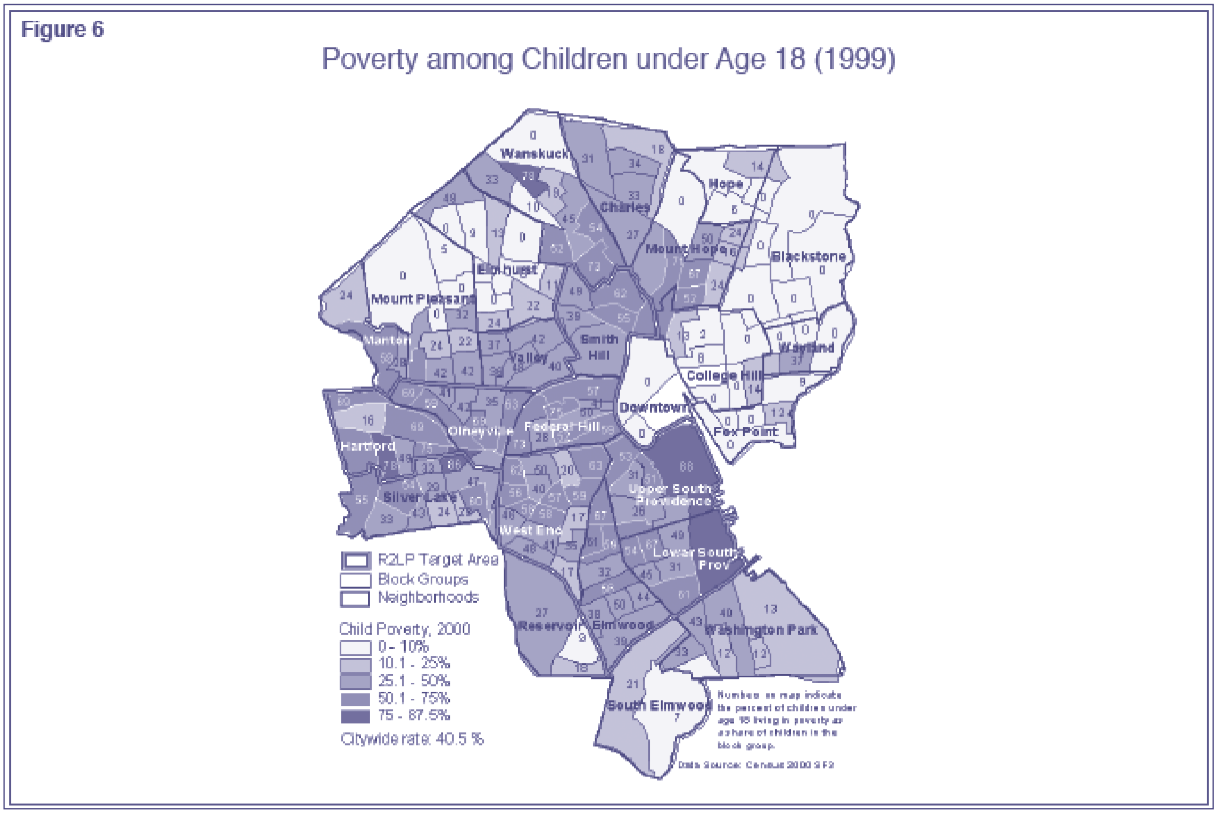


Figure 3 – Poverty among children under age 18 (figure 6, p 15 in report)



Next Steps

The report's tagline, *Advancing a community conversation about school readiness in Providence,* best explains R2LP's goal in developing the indicator report. To this end, R2LP created a 45-hour, college-level course for AmeriCorps members with the report serving as the primary text. The course was designed to translate data into action by helping AmeriCorps members become more familiar with school readiness issues throughout the city through both data and personal stories of residents and leaders working in the community. Along with studying the 24 indicators presented in the report, participants selected an issue of their choice to study in depth and prepare a "community action" to help alleviate the problem in some way.

All 30 members participated in the course for college credit in the spring of 2006 and new members will take the course in spring 2007.

ProvPlan will continue to work in partnership with the Providence schools and the Department of Health to integrate data streams to provide the best picture of where the obstacles lie in preparing our children to succeed in school. These local data resources, combined with what we know about our neighborhoods will help to identify needs, target resources, inform programs, and measure outcomes. R2LP's mission is that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn, and the data partnerships we have formed with the Department of Health and others are invaluable to help us toward that goal.

Appendix 1
School Transition Plans Survey Protocol

Introduction. The primary work of the school is educating children, and most of that education occurs during school hours with children who are in school. At the same time, the school's work is easier and more productive both if students start school with basic preparation and developmental skills and parents provide ongoing help, both being involved at home in their children's education and being connected to the school.

The transition period – as a child moves from being at home or in child care to kindergarten and into first grade – is a very important period. Children must adjust to new situations, and the more prepared both children and their parents are for this transition, and the more connected schools are to those children and parents even before school starts, the better the children do.

Typically, there is little support or direction provided to elementary schools explicitly for making this transition, but most schools do some things to help in this transition process. Developing services and supports during this transition period also is a good way to build parent and school partnerships after the children are in school.

We are seeking to find out what current elementary schools in specific neighborhoods are doing for this transition period. We have a list of things that some schools around the country have done to enhance transitions and take the opportunity to build stronger parent and school partnerships. We want to get some basic information on what is going on today at our elementary schools. We also want to collect any materials that schools have developed to support this transition process. While schools currently may not have the resources or support to do a great deal of transition work, we believe schools are very interested in supporting and leading transition activities, particularly if they have parents and community members who are willing to help.

Interview approach. Working through the school principal, we are identifying the school person who has been identified to us as the "expert" and leader in the school in this area. We also will meet with more than one person at a school, if that is the desire. We are approaching this as an opportunity to build upon work already underway and bring some time and talents (parents and community members) to the table. We start with a series of checklist questions in order to get a picture of current school transition activities:

Checklist Questions. Which of these does your elementary school currently have in place?

- ☐ A transition coordinator at the school (someone with responsibility and dedicated time for transition planning)
- ☐ A transition team (including parents and teachers who plan transition activities)
- ☐ Parent preparation materials related to kindergarten entry (outlining what parents can expect from schools and the school's definition of "school readiness," tips for parents of what to do)
- ☐ Home visits to children who will be entering kindergarten and their parents prior to start of kindergarten
- ☐ Activities to prepare children and parents for transition that start in the fall of the year before school entry
- ☐ Collaborations with child care centers and providers to align standards for learning approaches between providers and schools
- ☐ Collaborations with child care centers and providers, parents, and schools to allow for sharing specific information about individual children that can aid their development in kindergarten
- ☐ Clear expectations for children entering kindergarten that are held by all kindergarten teachers and staff working with kindergartners and that are shared with parents
- ☐ Opportunities for parents and children to visit the school prior to kindergarten entry
- ☐ Early parent-child conferences to identify and address transition issues that may have arisen

- ☐ Welcome wagons and other activities to make parents feel comfortable at school
- ☐ Volunteer activities and classroom participation opportunities for parents of kindergartners
- ☐ Language- and culture- specific engagement opportunities for parents and children
- ☐ Other (please describe)

_____
_____
_____
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Follow-up Questions. The following are follow-up questions, after going through the checklist.

- ☐ What would you most like to have available in transition activities that don't now exist.
- ☐ What can parents and community residents do to help with transition, and how can they best connect up with the school?
- ☐ What can care providers (centers and family home caregivers and family, friend, and neighbor care providers) do to help in the transition?
- ☐ What would be most helpful in supporting the school in any work to expand transition activities?

Appendix 2

Conducting an Environmental Scan Through Interviewing Program Directors and Staff

The only way to obtain some important information about services and supports available in the community -- often the building blocks for future activities -- is through direct contact with those programs and their staff or with people who are very knowledgeable about them. This work involves *relationship-building* as well as *information-gathering*. Particularly when dealing with smaller, nonprofit groups or faith groups or service organizations, there may be limited official record-keeping and people may be quite uncomfortable sharing funding information or personnel information. The more trust that the information gatherers have with the programs they approach, the more likely they are to gather more complete information.

Environmental scans generally try to answer the following questions:

- What programs, organizations, or associations are connecting with and providing support to the population (young children and their families) that we are interested in?
- What types of support (programming) are they providing (parenting education, child care, health services, home visiting, peer support groups, individual counseling and case management, referral to other services)?
- What population are they reaching (both in numbers and special emphasis, e.g. are they focused upon serving children with disabilities; do they place a particular emphasis upon socially isolated families; do they work within a specific housing project or neighborhood)?
- How extensive/comprehensive/holistic/ongoing are the supports they are providing (how many families do they see at least monthly over the course of at least a year, where they really feel they have strong attachments)?

Environmental scans related to "children healthy and ready to succeed in school" could be focused upon one or more of the following specific areas:

- Home visiting, parenting education, and other programs designed to provide parents with information and support about child developmental practices
- Peer support and mutual assistance groups that bring people together who are parents, grandparents, or caregivers on a regular basis to draw support from one another around their nurturing of young children
- Health-related activities that seek to enroll children in health coverage, acquire medical homes, address environmental hazards (lead poisoning, environmental toxins), get dental care, ensure immunizations are on target, etc.
- Pre-school programming designed to provide enriched developmental programming for three- and four-year olds (This requires a definition of the characteristics that are required for a program to be considered a quality preschool program – e.g. minimum hours (15 per week), staffing levels (1 teacher to 8 students), overall per child funding $3,000), teacher requirements (80% B.A. or higher).)
- Kindergarten transition activities conducted by or with schools to provide activities for parents and children to connect with their elementary schools and to align pre-school activities with school expectations
- K-3 after-school programming designed to strengthen school success through structured activities devoted to continued child development (as well as providing a safe and supportive after-school environment for children).

The basic steps for gathering such information include:

1. Identifying the programs, services or supports that exist in the community (2-1-1 directories may provide a starting point, but key informant interviews should be able to identify additional resources)
2. Defining the type of information that should be gathered about them (which may be from fairly basic to quite extensive, depending upon the needs of the group) and determining how the information will be used
3. Providing background information to the programs, services, or supports on why getting information about their work is important and making contact with them to gather that information (generally, gathering this information cannot be achieved through sending out surveys or questionnaires but requires direct meetings, which also is an opportunity to build relationships and share information)
4. Assembling the information gathered into a report that will be useful for planning, for the programs interviewed, and for the community.

There is no "one size fits all" environmental scanning or interview tool, and scanning strategies will need to be contoured to the neighborhoods and communities they serve.

In some instances, it may be possible to construct simplified environmental scans by making use of people with community knowledge and expertise of a broad range of programs. For instance, it may be possible to identify and describe the array of enriched pre-school programs in the community by drawing upon people from child care resource and referral, Head Start, and the public school systems in identifying those programs (and the number of slots they have) that meet the definition for a relatively comprehensive pre-school experience.

Endnotes

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[9] To the extent possible, analysis should explore breakdowns by neighborhood and by race/ethnicity, income, and other factors. Different administrative data sets may use different categories for race/ethnicity (e.g. census data provides a race designation that enables respondents to select multiple races and has a separate "Hispanic" designation while many administrative data sets only allow for designation of race/ethnicity by White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or other). They may also have different measures of income.
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[12] For an example of geo-mapping work and its implications to policy, see: Bruner, C. (2004). *Where have all the young men gone? Using data to support ex-offender reintegration and community building in Des Moines' inner cities.* Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.
[13] For more information, visit the http://www.preknow.org and http://www.packard.org web sites. Segal, A., and Bruner, C. (2004). *On the path to school readiness: Key questions to consider before establishing universal pre-kindergarten.* Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.
[14] The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and its website (www.nieer.org) have a wealth of information on this subject, including a wide variety of state-level data.
[15] This use of FFN care varies widely across states, depending upon state financing and regulation of child care, cultural preferences, and the demographics of the population. For national and selected state estimates, see: Sonenstein, F. Gates, G., Schmidt, S. & Bolshun, N (2002). *Primary care arrangements of employed parents: Findings from the 1999 national survey of America's families*. Assessing the New Federalism Occasional Paper Number 59. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.
[16] Chapter Two of *Many Happy Returns* summarizes a number of these economic impact studies and provides references for toolkits that have been developed to help communities conduct them. Bruner, C. (2004). *Many happy returns: Three economic models that make the case for school readiness.* Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.
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SECPTAN and

About SECPTAN

The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) provides current information about early childhood policy initiatives to state policy makers. It assists them in assessing the best available evidence and information about effective policies and practices in early childhood. The network is managed by the Child & Family Policy Center, with funding from the Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. For more information about SECPTAN, visit www.finebynine.org or contact Charles Bruner, Network Director, or Vivian Day at 515-280-9027.

About NNIP

The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a collaborative effort by the Urban Institute and local partners to further the development and use of neighborhood information systems in local policymaking and community building. The Partnership is managed by the Urban Institute, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Fannie Mae Foundation. For more information about NNIP, visit www.urban.org/nnip or contact Tom Kingsley at 202-261-5585.

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